Youth Education Programs for Neighborhood Networks Centers

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Youth Education Programs for Neighborhood Networks Centers

This publication was developed by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to assist in the planning and development of Neighborhood Networks centers.

The guides in this series offer "how to" information on starting a center, creating programs and identifying center partners, marketing and media outreach, sustainability, funding, and much more.

These newly updated guides feature new contacts, resources, case studies, and helpful information.

Neighborhood Networks is a community-based program established by HUD in 1995. Since then, hundreds of centers have opened throughout the United States and Puerto Rico. These community technology centers provide residents of HUD insured and assisted properties with programs, activities, and training promoting economic self-sufficiency.

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Introduction

Youth education programs are a major focus for Neighborhood Networks centers serving HUD-assisted and/or -insured apartment properties with a large proportion of families. Many of these centers are using technology to help children achieve academic success, foster joy in learning, expand career horizons, and promote critical thinking skills.

Although computers and Internet access are coming down in price, and U.S. households have made significant gains in Internet access since 1998, it is still sufficiently expensive and household income remains an important factor in home Internet access.

The tremendous growth in household computer and Internet use has occurred across all demographic groups, including income and education levels, race, location, and household types. In 2000 nearly four out of five households with computers had Internet access (*Falling Through the Net: Toward Digital Inclusion,* 2000) Nevertheless, some Americans are still connecting at far lower rates than others, creating a *digital divide* (i.e., a difference in rates of access to computers and the Internet) among different demographic groups.

While individuals in all income groups were more likely to be Internet users in 2000 than in 1998, Internet use rates were greater in higher income brackets. According to a report from the Department of Commerce, 30.1 percent of households in the $15,000–24,999 bracket had computers in 2000, compared to 86.3 percent of households with income levels of more than $75,000. That makes providing computer access at Neighborhood Networks centers especially critical for low-income children. In *Impact of CTCNet Affiliates* (1998), the research team of

Chow, Ellis, Mark, and Wise found that "providing a friendly, supportive environment in which to learn about computers or use them in the pursuit of other goals is a key feature of community technology centers." In a 1997 study, *Community Technology Centers: Impact on Individual Participants and Their Communities,* the researchers found that young people went to the centers because their parents believed the centers were safe and helped children stay out of trouble and away from drugs. The centers also offered access to "learning opportunities, computers, fun activities, and people to help with homework," the research team concluded.

This handbook is designed for Neighborhood Networks center sponsors, staff, and partners who want to create effective programs for young people under the age of 18.

Part One identifies key issues in creating programs for youth and highlights effective strategies, including how to design youth programs that correspond to child development stages, how to support and augment the school experience, and how best to find staff, partners, and volunteers for youth programs.

Part Two includes case studies of successful youth programs in Neighborhood Networks centers and other community settings.

- Joint Activity Center: Denver, Colorado
- Town Park Village: Miami, Florida
- Whispering Pines: Sacramento, California
- Magic Johnson Inventor Center at Ujima Village: Los Angeles, California
- Friendship Village: Virginia Beach, Virginia
- Shawnee Gardens: Louisville, Kentucky

Part Three provides an annotated list of resources that can help Neighborhood Networks center staff develop youth programs.

Part One: Key Challenges and Effective Strategies in Youth Programming

Neighborhood Networks centers face five key challenges in developing effective youth programs:

- *Articulating a clear guiding purpose.* Youth activities will vary depending on each center's overall mission and program goals. Whatever the specific mix, however, youth programming should help young people master technology. The idea is to reinforce children's basic technology skills and enable them to handle with confidence whatever technology they may later encounter.

- *Determining the focus of youth programs.* Some Neighborhood Networks center programs help young people with homework and tie technology use to school-related projects. Others focus on offering nonschool-related activities and structured projects. Most centers allow for free time or games after homework is completed. Some programs use an open lab approach.

  Others use the computer lab as an adjunct to other after-school activities, such as arts and crafts, scouting, or a broader enrichment or personal empowerment program. Neighborhood Networks centers sometimes include programs for preschoolers, and some have intergenerational activities.

  What is the best approach? The one that best fits the needs and goals of residents. Ideally, centers will provide school support programs, but these will be just the beginning. Whatever the mix, staff, children, and parents should understand the scope and limits of the center's youth activities.

- *Paying attention to developmental stages.* Devising a learning environment and activities that are appropriate for different age groups is a critical challenge in youth programming. Activities will need to accommodate children's varying developmental and social skills. The space itself, for example, should be adaptable for small as well as full-sized people and arranged for ease of supervision. Scheduling must take into account children's attention spans and enthusiasm. Center staff need special information about younger users, including parental permissions and telephone numbers.

  Software choices should include carefully selected programs. Software that requires fine motor control of the mouse and an understanding of relatively advanced facts or complex concepts will be inappropriate for younger children. Software stressing simplicity and repetition will bore older children. Although the center should always be staffed, younger children need more structure and supervision, while older ones need more flexibility and independence. Younger users probably will need some assistance in focusing their attention and energy in the lab. This need not be intrusive control; asking them to stop to sign in and designate a preferred activity may be sufficient.

  Ideally, different age groups will be scheduled to be in the center at separate times, although there may be some open family time. The center may need different rules about which equipment can be used for what. For example, while 8-year-olds may confidently use a "paint" program independently, use of scanners and photo imaging software might be restricted to older children or require direct staff supervision. Neighborhood Networks centers using the Internet also must give attention to special issues of access and safety for their younger users and be prepared to work with parents in setting boundaries for children's activities.

- *Designing learning experiences that use technology as a tool.* The prime time for youth programs is late afternoon when centers offer after-school activities. Some centers may want to respond to the needs of working parents by providing general child care and entertainment. But Neighborhood Networks centers and center youth programs can, and should, be much more. To make best use of the investment in technology, it is important for the center to develop an active and clearly communicated educational program that complements recreation programs and hanging out with friends. The center is a place to learn by doing. When staff create that expectation, children respect it, and the center can be both manageable and enjoyable. In creating a safe and comfortable activity space, the center can teach the key lesson that learning is fun.

- *Securing resources to maintain an effective learning environment.* Money is essential for the Neighborhood Networks center, but it is only part of the equation for the best youth-oriented centers. Equally important are thoughtful, creative, and flexible staff members, both paid and volunteers. Developing effective working relationships with other community organizations, especially education agencies, is also a key program component. Good partnerships not only attract varied resources to the center, they also create community and a sense for residents of being connected to the larger society.

Additional resources are available to Neighborhood Networks Centers that have 501(c)(3) status, including tax deductions for donors and tax exemptions for the incorporated nonprofit organization. *Call the Neighborhood Networks Information Center at (888) 312–2743 for additional information or to learn how to begin the process to seek 501(c)(3) status.*

Highlights of Effective Programs and Strategies

Supporting School Success

Neighborhood Networks centers can support academic success by helping with homework and school projects, providing information for children and parents about working effectively with the schools, and offering opportunities for participation in special programs and events to strengthen academic skills. In developing effective school support programs Neighborhood Networks centers should:

- *Learn about your residents' schools.* Centers should make a special effort to reach out to the schools their residents attend. The centers should ask school principals and technology coordinators about the computer technology used at school and the school's expectations about computer access at students' homes. Teachers and school officials will be glad to learn about the Neighborhood Networks center offerings and many will be eager to help center staff provide a smooth connection between school and home. It may also be possible to develop relationships with particular teachers. Among the topics to discuss: What kind of computers are the schools using and what software for different ages? At what age and for what types of projects are children expected to use the Internet for research? What policies do the schools have for Internet use? Are there curriculum frameworks and standards for technology skills? Will the schools provide free or low-cost copies (including manuals and teachers' guides) of educational software currently in use? Will the schools provide training or other resources for center staff? How can your center benefit from a community service requirement?

- *Provide an appropriate working space.* If the Neighborhood Networks center will serve as a homework center, it needs work tables and materials as well as computers and related equipment. Some centers may be

able to find additional space (and staff or volunteer supervisors) for homework activities. Very small centers may be precluded from offering general homework supervision but may be able to help children use computers to work on specific projects.

- *Use appropriate equipment and software.* The most versatile software programs are the standard office packages that can be used for writing, math, and organizing stories and reports, supplemented by reference programs on CD-ROMs and the Internet. Because younger children may find a full-fledged word processor overwhelming, centers with very young participants may want to use a simplified "Works" program. Matching the center's word processing software to school software is advisable. Other core software might include a childrens' drawing program, publishing program, typing program, and Web page editor.

  There is an ever-growing supply of software labeled "educational" available in the marketplace, but some of it is not very educational. Among the academic software of interest to young users are varying levels of math, grammar, and language reviews, and SAT preparation software. Often, such software uses music, graphics, and games designed to make the work more fun. In choosing software, the most important questions are:

  - Will it actively engage users in learning rather than just mouse-clicking drills?

  - Do games and other features support or detract from learning?

- Will the software help users do something new or better?

- Is it easy to use and support in your center?

- Is the software—especially games—consistent with the values of your program?

Center staff should ask children what is on their software wish lists before purchasing programs. The center may be able to get a review copy and have the children test it. Center staff may also want to consult a software review site on the World Wide Web or software reviews in various publications. For example, check out www.superchildren.com or another site listed in the box on the following page.

- **Provide adequate and appropriate supervision.** Many children will need help developing good homework habits, in addition to help understanding specific assignments and tasks. Neighborhood Networks centers may need to recruit parents, grandparents, older youth, or other volunteers to oversee homework, offer encouragement, and recognize the children's progress. All staff need to understand how to help without taking over. Some schools provide a call-in telephone line or television program for homework help, and some teachers now arrange for e-mail help. Online homework resources are also available such as those listed in the resource section of this guide and in the following box.

Software

These Web sites review software for young people. Many sites accept reviews from teachers and students. Reviewing software can be an excellent project for children of all ages.

Children's Software Revue *(www2.childrenssoftware.com/childrenssoftware/)* This site complements the Children's Software Revue, a print magazine with news about the Internet and software, feature articles, and book reviews. The site's most popular feature is the searchable database, the Children's Software Finder™ that includes thousands of software reviews. Children's Software Revue is published by Active Learning Associates, Flemington, NJ (800) 993–9499.

Superkids Educational Software Review *(www.superchildren.com)* This excellent site includes software reviews by children, parents, and teachers. There is also a set of forms for contributing reviews.

TERC Math Games List *(www.terc.edu/mathequity/gw/html/reviews.html)* This Web site—part of a project to encourage greater involvement of girls in math, science, and technology—describes dozens of math games and software for children of all ages. There is also a helpful article about what makes good software good.

Great Software for Kids & Parents (The Dummies Guide to Family Computing) A thoughtful, unbiased look at what programs really are both educational and entertaining (as well as what age groups and personality types particular titles are suited). They point the way toward software designed for everything from mastering a foreign language and developing math skills to improving reading comprehension and building critical thinking abilities.

Review Corner *(www.school.discovery.com/parents/reviewcorner/software/)* This Web site rates educational software on a five-star system. The site looks for products that are thoughtfully designed and produced and that offer positive encouraging, and socially responsible experiences to the children who use them.

Homework Help

New sites are regularly coming online. Center staff may want to bookmark homework sites in the center's Web browser or set up a homework help Web page.

Ask Dr. Math *(mathforum.org/dr.math/)* Learners of all ages can ask math questions at this site, which also features archives of answers and other information about math problems and topics.

B.J. Pinchbeck's Homework Helper *(www.school.discovery.com/homeworkhelp/bjpinchbeck/)* This guide contains 700 links to reference works and other resources and was created by and for a middle-schooler, with links appropriate for all ages.

Ask A Scientist/MAD Scientist Network *(www.madsci.org)* There is interesting and fun scientific information on this site (it divides home experiments into edible and inedible, for example). Centers may find it especially useful for homework help. Professional scientists answer questions for students of all ages. The site includes an archive of previous questions and answers.

StudyWeb *(www.studyweb.com)* This collection of links to educational and reference sites is organized by subject matter and is especially useful for older children working on papers.

Tutor.com *(www.tutor.com.discoveryschool/)* On school nights, this site offers a free 20-minute, one-to-one homework help session on all school subjects.

Offering Independent Learning Opportunities

Neighborhood Networks centers can provide a wide range of learning experiences for young users to develop creativity, intellectual independence, and critical thinking. The center can encourage children to learn in a more relaxed environment, without the structure and pressure of tests and grades. Staff can work with children to identify their interests and devise appropriate projects. Activities can range from simple drawing or illustrating stories with clip art to more complex projects like creating Web pages or learning to write a new game program with audio and video effects.

Activities can readily be geared to different ages and computer skill levels. A group of 12-year-olds, for example, might help plan a community garden and, in the process, learn to use a variety of computer programs, including drawing programs, word processing to write a survey identifying residents' plant preferences, and the Internet or a CD-ROM program to research growing cycles. Another group might write a cookbook of residents' favorite recipes, or prepare a community newsletter with photographs taken with a digital camera. Younger children might use a paint program to outline pictures for placemats, which they could then color with crayons and laminate. Or they could use word processing and clip art to write and illustrate a joke book. Older children might participate in a college or job preparation project in which they use computers to research job opportunities and prepare resumes and applications. Such activities may be organized into larger projects or clubs.

Participating in Special Learning Opportunities

Neighborhood Networks centers may be able to participate in special projects and competitions designed primarily, but not exclusively, for school classes. These include programs such as ThinkQuest Jr., grades 4–6; ThinkQuest Internet Challenge for ages 12–19; the Bayer-National Science Foundation *Award for Community Innovation;* the Computer Learning Foundation's *Our Town* project; and

International Education and Resource Network (I*EARN) communications and writing projects. Contact information for these organizations appears in the resource section of this guide. Centers might also create joint projects with other Neighborhood Networks centers, community technology centers or nearby schools. Such activities may demand a different kind of staff involvement beyond coaching children in computer programs or helping with homework. But these activities can offer a richer educational program at Neighborhood Networks centers. Community or industry volunteers are excellent resources.

Providing Free Time and Special Events

A center that targets homework support ideally also will provide free time or open lab time. Most children are motivated by the chance to pursue their own projects. Older youth may be independent enough to participate in adult open lab time and appreciate being considered as adults for that purpose. Younger children may need separate time set aside as part of the after-school program or as family time, when they bring an older sibling or adult to the center. Intergenerational activities can contribute significantly to the quality of life in a housing development. Possible projects might include working together on a residents' newsletter or designing decorations for a community room.

Most centers will develop a core program that fills the daily schedule and weekly calendar. But time can still be set aside for special programs. It is especially important to provide opportunities for parents to learn about the center and their children's activities. A Neighborhood Networks center can give parents a safe, comfortable place to raise questions about technology issues, even if they are not participating in other center programs. In addition to "show and tell" sessions where the children display their new skills for their parents, centers might offer special events like a student-parent session on using the Internet to explore college options or a discussion on Internet safety issues such as participating in chat rooms and dealing with inappropriate materials on the World Wide Web. Public

school and library staff may be available to participate in such programs.

Finding Staff and Volunteers for Youth Programs

Computers are no substitute for good coaches and teachers. The most effective Neighborhood Networks center youth programs feature a strong center director, funding for additional youth staff, and volunteers to complement center staff. Centers use a variety of staffing arrangements, including part-time and contract employees. A few centers have a full-time youth education coordinator. Increasingly, centers are training residents to help staff youth programs. Even the strongest centers rarely have all the paid staff they need for their youth programs. Therefore, centers should think of volunteer staffing as a strategy, with a plan for recruiting, training, and recognizing the volunteers.

National programs, such as AmeriCorps VISTA: Volunteers in Service To America, can be an excellent source of volunteers for Neighborhood Networks centers. These volunteers are recruited for year-long, full-time positions in local public agencies or private nonprofit organizations. For more information about the VISTA program in your state, visit the AmeriCorps Web site *www.americorps.org* or call (888) 507–5962.

Churches and other private organizations also have volunteer programs, as do a growing number of colleges and high schools that now have community service requirements. Centers may be able to interest individual college and graduate/education students or employees from a nearby business in volunteering. Residents who have graduated from adult programs at Neighborhood Networks centers can be trained to help with youth programs. Such volunteer work may be structured as part of a path leading to paid employment.

Many centers use volunteers to supervise children, but often volunteers can play a more significant role.

The best programs invite volunteers to add to the knowledge and skills available at the center and expose young people to a larger group of successful adults and mentors.

Building Community Partnerships

Successful youth programs draw heavily on partnerships with public and private agencies to support their youth education activities. Schools and community colleges are key places to seek partners and such relationships can be extremely beneficial for the center and its users. Successful partnerships take real effort to establish and sustain. Schools operate in a more structured and formal system than Neighborhood Networks centers and some officials may be slow to see centers as educational peers. It can be helpful to cultivate one person in the school as a "champion" to help develop a good working relationship.

Good communications skills also are necessary for establishing and maintaining strong school partnerships. Both schools and Neighborhood Networks centers share a mutual interest in helping children learn. Focusing on specific projects—creating successes in the partnership—can provide a basis for more far-reaching activities.

Federally funded education programs now stress the importance of community collaborations. A strong relationship with education agencies may open up opportunities for acquiring equipment and materials, volunteers, or even participating as a community partner in a large-scale grant or other program not otherwise open to Neighborhood Networks centers.

Federal Education Initiatives

Three federal initiatives may offer special opportunities, resources, and ideas to Neighborhood Networks youth education programs:

America Reads seeks to ensure that every child develops strong reading skills by working at the local level through partnerships between schools, businesses, and community organizations to provide reading tutors, books, summer reading programs, and tips for parents. A new part of this program called **America Counts** focuses on building math skills for middle school students. Materials created for these programs may be helpful resources for Neighborhood Networks center staff. For example, *Yes, You Can* is a guide to setting up mentoring programs. See *www.ed.gov/inits/americareads.*

21st Century Community Learning Centers is a federal program which funds school-based after-school learning activities. Each project must establish a working partnership with community partners, such as Ys or Boys & Girls Clubs. In some communities, Neighborhood Networks centers may be able to become partners or provide services. See *www.ed.gov/21stCCLC.*

Gear Up is a new program to help low-income middle school students and their families become more aware of and prepare for college. The program will provide grants for local collaborations that sponsor information, mentoring, and enrichment programs. See *http://www.ed.gov/gearup.*

For each of these programs, funds are provided through competitive grants to schools or school districts. Interested Neighborhood Networks centers should reach out to their local school system to learn about participating. In some cases, a center representative may be asked to sit on a local coordinating committee, which can open doors for other resources. Materials developed for these programs will be available, usually at no cost, for use in center programs. Call (800) USA–LEARN.

Part Two: Case Studies and Examples

**Joint Activity Center
Denver, Colorado**

Located in Denver, the Joint Activities Center is one of six Neighborhood Networks centers in Colorado. Equipped with 11 Pentium-based computers, the children have access to the Internet, and enjoy educational software such as Scholastic's Magic School Bus, Typing Tutor, Compton's Encyclopedia, World Book, and Encarta 2000 reference library.

The center challenges youth through rewarding educational programs as well. The Slam-Dunk Typing contest allows kids to gain points by learning to type fast and accurately. When they have gained enough points, they are inducted into a Hall of Fame.

Recently, the program gained its fourth member, and at least 30 more youths are attempting to enter the honored group. According to Tony

Frank, the Neighborhood Networks coordinator at the center, entering the Slam-Dunk Typing Hall of Fame is quite an accomplishment.

As a reward for their achievement, Hall of Fame members, who range from elementary school students to high school seniors, receive gift certificates from a local bookstore.

The center also runs the Yo-Yo Olympics, an activity that allows kids to have fun, while learning to become Internet proficient. This contest challenges youth and teens, ages 7 to 18, to use the Internet to research yo-yos and learn how to perform yo-yo tricks. The Joint Activities Center previously held a Paper Airplane Olympics using the same methodology.

Another beneficial activity is called Youth Computer Quest. As part of the program, kids are given questions on a variety of subjects and are asked to find the answers using the World Wide Web.

Town Park Village
Miami, Florida

A Florida Neighborhood Networks center has discovered a wonderful *low-tech* partnership opportunity to complement the advanced technical training it offers, and balance out the hours young people may spend in front of a computer as part of the center's primary mission.

In addition to several technical training and support partnerships, the Town Park Village Neighborhood Networks Center in Miami, Florida, has developed a strategic partnership with the local Sierra Club chapter to provide inner-city youth with educational adventures in natural or wilderness settings, Center Director Kris Smith reports.

On a recent Saturday in December, nine girls and three boys from the Town Park Center, ages 8 to 12 years, accompanied by three adult chaperones enjoyed a 1-day bike trip down the 8-mile Shark Valley Trail in the Florida Everglades. Along the way, they stopped to view alligators, fish, and birds they had learned about in an orientation conducted by Sierra Club members at the center the previous Thursday. The young participants also received exposure to and training in bicycle safety, including helmet use, with bicycles and helmets provided by the Sierra Club chapter.

The local chapter provides three to four outings per year for the center's youth, with the club picking up the cost of transportation, food, and equipment, as part of a national Sierra Club program, Inner City Outings. (See the program's Web page at *www.sierraclub.org/ico/* for more information, including listings of participating local chapters.) Other recent outings have including canoeing in the Everglades, and sailing on Biscayne Bay.

Center staff initially approached the local club chapter 2 years ago about developing a strategic relationship, and found chapter members "very willing and open." The chapter also provides a program on soil and water quality at the center's summer camp. Now, Smith says, the center and chapter are developing a year-round program on central city environmental questions, such as how to deal with trash, and "How do we take care of our area?" One activity being planned for next year is planting a small urban garden.

Whispering Pines Neighborhood
Networks Center
Sacramento, California

Elementary school students are learning how to resolve conflict situations in a peaceful manner at the Neighborhood Networks center at Whispering Pines Apartments. In collaboration with a local elementary school, conflict manager training is offered to fourth- through sixth-grade children at the property who want to become conflict managers. The training is conducted after school and includes teaming up with experienced conflict managers during the school day. Upon completing their training, the new conflict managers patrol the play areas at Whispering Pines to help maintain a peaceful environment.

If a conflict arises, a team of two conflict managers approaches the children who are having a problem. The managers are equipped with a list of questions to guide them in solving the argument. The rules set out in the beginning of the dispute resolution process include:

- Allowing each person an opportunity to talk.
- No name calling.
- Telling the truth about what happened.
- Agreeing to solve the problem.

The peer conflict managers at the Neighborhood Networks center have settled many conflict situations. One conflict manager cited an example of a child who was teasing a playmate. In retaliation, the playmate began kicking the other child. The conflict managers took the two children aside and went through the questions outlined above. After talking through the conflict, the playmates realized that teasing is wrong and the children apologized to each other. With help from the conflict managers, children at Whispering Pines are interacting more harmoniously, and conflict managers are seeing fewer conflicts arise.

The Whispering Pines Neighborhood Networks Center also provides other creative youth activities. One of the most popular projects is the Youth Groundskeeping Volunteer Program, which was created by Whispering Pines' assistant manager. Guided by a caring adult and equipped with gloves, trash bags, and "trash picker-uppers," the youth groundskeepers patrol the apartment complex grounds and dispose of unwanted trash. The kids realize the value of a clean environment and are learning teamwork and responsibility.

Working with the Head Start Preschool Program, the center has opened an onsite library. Guided by the expertise of the local town librarian, a manageable check-in and checkout book system was developed. The children set up the book system and run the library. The library books were all donated and target readers from preschool to adult.

Magic Johnson Inventor Center
at Ujima Village
Los Angeles, California

The Youth Literacy Connection Program at the Magic Johnson Inventor Center at Ujima Village in Los Angeles, California, offers homework assistance and tutoring to approximately 55 students ages 5 to 17. The after-school program is held 4 days a week, attracting 30 youth and children per day.

To encourage student participation, the program offers incentives, such as participating in the center's recreational activities, including sports and field trips. Tutoring is provided by three staff members who are assisted by some of the older students and senior citizen volunteers. As a result of the tutoring, a first-grader has increased her reading level by two grades and now has the confidence to read aloud to her reading group.

The students use the Magic Johnson Inventor Center in Ujima Village, which features 20 state-of-the-art computers, as well as servers, printers, and other accessories, donated by the Magic Johnson Foundation and the HP Philanthropy and HP Multi-Cultural Marketing

Program. The center integrates technology and education with the use of PLATO® learning software. This software offers coursework in academic subjects as well as life skills and job preparation.

The older students use PLATO® to prepare for standardized tests, such as the SAT or ACT or the GED exam. Junior high and high school students who participate in the Youth Literacy Connection Program receive information on how to apply for college. The high school students take tours of local universities and colleges and attend college fairs.

Friendship Village
Virginia Beach, Virginia

We Care Center at Friendship Village, a HUD community technology center, certainly knows the value of partners, such as HOPE for Kids. The We Care Center offers programs and activities that meet Neighborhood Networks' mission to help residents become economically self-sufficient. The center provides computer access and training, education, job training, and health and human services for residents of all ages.

For the holiday party at the We Care Center at Friendship Village last year, HOPE for Kids volunteers brought more than 200 presents to ensure that every child went home with a gift. In another gesture of generosity, HOPE for Kids volunteers helped spruce up the property and paint the center. When it was time for children to head back to school in September, HOPE for Kids volunteers provided more than $700 in school supplies so the children would be prepared for learning.

Initially, said Center Coordinator Saulo Ortiz, HOPE for Kids helped parents enroll their children in the State Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), a federal initiative to provide health coverage to children of the working poor. "But now they offer anything we need," Ortiz said, highlighting the donations of gifts, school supplies, and volunteer hours contributed by HOPE for Kids.

The center relies on a variety of partnerships to sustain its activities, Ortiz said. Partners include the Virginia Beach Community Foundation, which funds a childcare program; the FBI, which provides volunteer staff who teach job-preparation and computer classes; and local television station WHRO, which provides technical support.

The partnership with HOPE for Kids is unique for this center because it began at the national level between the outreach organization and Neighborhood Networks. National partnerships are developed by Neighborhood Networks with organizations that have local affiliates, as a means to reach residents who use their local Neighborhood Networks center for essential programs and services.

Shawnee Gardens
Louisville, Kentucky

Not only are children at the Shawnee Gardens Neighborhood Networks Center learning about computers, they are being introduced to their South African counterparts. Shawnee Gardens' South Africa pen pal program allows children to learn about their African heritage. The center formed partnerships with a school system and church in South Africa, and 20 of the center's children were paired with children living in South Africa.

The children e-mail each other daily, talking about, among other things, their respective countries, their lives, and interests. The program also has allowed the center's kids, who range in age from 6 to 17, to earn extra credit in their schoolwork.

Other Examples

The Pelham Network Center in Framingham, Massachussetts, and Grier Park in Charlotte, North Carolina, also forged relationships with local law enforcement agencies to support youth programs while extending the message against drugs and violence. Local FBI agents work with the Friendship Village Neighborhood Networks center in Virginia Beach, Virginia. Drug Elimination Grants can fund such activity and a

town or city may have community policing funds that could be tapped as well.

At the South End Technology Center at Tent City in Boston, Massachusetts, volunteers from a community organization called Tecs-Change offer a computer repair learning program for teens. Young people learn how to repair donated equipment for recycling to less-developed countries. As they successfully complete the program, the youngsters earn a recycled computer for themselves. *(See www.tecschange.org.)*

Staff at the Grove Neighborhood Networks Center in Greeley, Colorado, created an after-school Internet adventure called "Romping Through the Rainforest." The staff set up four days of related activities on Web pages, with worksheets to guide the children in gathering information about different countries, cultures, and animals; playing games; drawing and painting pictures; and keeping a log of their adventures. The center staff provided links to Internet sites and games appropriate for different age groups, an "ecotourism" simulation, and a coloring book. Children who started got "Rainforest Explorer" photo ID cards, and children who finished (almost all) received self-designed T-shirts. *(See www.islandgrove.org/aftintro.html)*

Part Three: Resources

Neighborhood Networks centers can turn to a wealth of resources to support their youth program planning and activities. First among these are community partners.

The nearest public library is a good place to start to find a partner for a Neighborhood Networks center youth education program. Many libraries have received grants from government or technology companies to expand computer access, and many now provide free public Internet access. Library staff can help develop or share teaching materials. Libraries also have print resources that may be useful, and they may be willing to acquire materials—computer magazines, books, software, and CD-ROMs—that a center budget cannot support.

Library staff often have developed training on using Web search engines and other research techniques and probably will be eager to help residents learn to use their online catalogues. Again, the best partnerships will offer mutual benefits. While the library may be able to provide supplementary resources, center staff and advanced users, including youth, may be able to assist the library in presenting special events on the Internet, for example.

Nearby businesses and labor groups may also be interested in partnering with Neighborhood Networks centers. A bank, for example, might provide funds, volunteers, or surplus furniture, office supplies, and equipment or help develop and present projects related to banking and credit for older children. Other nearby employers and unions also may be interested in providing information about career possibilities as well as volunteer opportunities for their staff, both in person and online.

An excellent resource for new centers is staff from other Neighborhood Networks and computer technology centers. They have created an online discussion called **NNLearn** to explore issues of teaching and learning. To join in, send an e-mail message with contact information to nnlearn@neighborhoodnetworks.org.

Other e-mail lists and Internet news groups dealing with technology education, such as **Ed-Tech** and **Nettrain,** also may provide opportunities to discuss questions ranging from educational theory to installing computer memory. Most states have an organization serving school teachers using technology, and these may provide center staff with useful contacts, program ideas and even discounts on software. One contact list for such groups can be found at *www.iste.org/resources/index.shtml.* This list includes a wide variety of resources providing curriculum and activity ideas, as well as other useful information for technology-based youth education programs. The universe of such resources online is growing rapidly.

American Library Association *(www.ala.org)* In addition to comprehensive resources about public libraries, this site includes an excellent page of references for children and their caregivers, including suggestions for books as well as online links, and *The Librarian's Guide to Cyberspace for Parents & Children*, which covers a range of topics and issues about using the Internet safely and effectively.

Blue Web'n *(www.kn.pacbell.com/wired/ bluewebn)* Blue Web'n is a searchable database of outstanding Internet learning sites categorized by subject area, audience, and type (lessons, activities, projects, resources, references, and tools). It can be especially useful for planning classes and activities for all age groups, and includes online activities for learners. The *Blue Web'n Weekly Update* is an e-mail notice of the week's new hot picks.

College Board *(www.collegeboard.org)* is a national, nonprofit membership association dedicated to preparing, inspiring, and connecting students to college and opportunity. Founded in 1900, the association is composed of more than 3,900 schools, colleges, universities, and other educational organizations. Each year, the College Board serves more than 3 million students and their parents, 22,000 high schools, and 3,500 colleges through major programs and services in college admission, guidance, assessment, financial aid, enrollment, and teaching and learning. Among its best-known programs are the SAT®, the PSAT/NMSQT®, the Advanced Placement Program® (AP), and Pacesetter®.

Community Technology Centers' Network (CTCNet) *(www.ctcnet.org)* A national network of community technology centers, CTCNet's 280 member centers offer computer access and education. These sites are enormously diverse in program areas and participating populations. The CTCNet Web site links to a treasure trove of information that may be helpful to Neighborhood Networks centers. CTCNet has conducted numerous research studies about the impact of Community Technology Centers. Two of those studies include *Who Goes There?,*

Longitudinal Case Studies of Twelve Users of Community Technology Centers (2000), and *Minority and Low-Income User Satisfaction at*

Community Technology Centers (2000). Both studies can be downloaded from the publications page of the Web site. CTCNet is located at 372 Broadway Street, Cambridge, MA 02139; phone: (617) 354–0825, e-mail sronan@ctcnet.org

Computer Learning Foundation
(www.computerlearning.org) This Web site provides free information to parents and educators, including articles, resource materials, information about Computer Learning Month activities and competitions, Our Town (sites where children have teamed up with local governments and businesses to construct their own town Web sites), links to good sites for children and families, lesson plans, and software reviews.

Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) *(www.eric.ed.gov) (1-800-LET-ERIC)* This federally funded information system provides services and products on a broad range of education issues. Offerings include practical and theoretical information on teaching and learning, such as digests of journal articles, lesson plans, and links to other Web sites. The ERIC clearinghouses have a variety of brochures, guides, and tip sheets for teachers and parents, including *Getting On Line: A Friendly Guide for Teachers, Students, and Parents,* and others on topics from teaching children about the environment to helping children with their homework, assessing teacher qualifications, and evaluating the appropriateness of school curriculum and instruction. Many of the most useful and accessible subsites are pulled together as the National Parent Information Network *(www.npin.org).* Another service is AskERIC, through which you can ask questions and receive answers by e-mail about education topics (send questions to *askeric@askeric.org*). The question and answer service on the AskERIC Web page is at *ericir.syr.edu/Qa/userformat.shtml.*

Equity On-Line *(www.edc.org/WomensEquity)* This site, part of the national Equity Resource Center for the Women's Educational Equity Act, provides data and resources on diversity issues, access to online discussion and courses, and ideas for curricula and projects promoting gender equity for girls and boys of all ages. "Women of Achievement" features brief biographies of notable women in all fields.

The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) *(www.fns.usda.gov/fns/)* This program administers the nutrition assistance programs of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The mission of FNS is to provide children and needy families better access to food and a more healthful diet through its food assistance programs and comprehensive nutrition education efforts. FNS has elevated nutrition and nutrition education to a top priority in all its programs. In addition to providing access to nutritious food, FNS also works to empower program participants with knowledge of the link between diet and health.

Healthfinder *(www.healthfinder.gov)* This U.S. Department of Health and Human Services gateway site links to a wide variety of information and resources on health, including medical dictionaries, support groups, hotlines, clinical reports, medical journals, and other resources accessible to the general public. You can also call the National Health Information Center at (800) 336–4797.

I*EARN (International Education and Resource Network) *(www.iearn.org)* I*EARN is a youth telecommunications network that facilitates international collaboration on classroom and other projects. Working together online, participants from more than 95 countries prepare, share, and develop opinions, research, and writings on a range of topics from cultural matters to environmental issues. While most projects have involved teens in school settings, I*EARN welcomes community-based participants as members.

Internet Public Library *(www.ipl.org)* This site aims to organize the Internet for all ages. It includes separate youth and teen divisions, with age-appropriate activities and links. The Youth Division page includes Web sites for science projects, a tour of a car factory, and a "story hour" page. The Teen Division includes links to

information on writing research papers, careers, and dating and other social issues. This section also has an extensive set of links to homework help sites.

Learn & Live *(www.glef.org/products.html)* The George Lucas Educational Foundation compiled the *Learn & Live* book and videotape to support effective public education and the innovative use of technology. While many of the anecdotes are geared toward public schools, some listed resources can help community-based organizations and Neighborhood Networks centers. The package (book and 1-hour documentary film) is available from the George Lucas Educational Foundation for $20 by calling (888) GLEFORG, or centers can order the package online at *store.yahoo.com/glef/learnlivekit.html.*

MaMa Media *(www.mamamedia.com)* This is a free online community for younger children geared to creative and fun activities and exchange, separate from homework or school subjects.

NASA's Quest Project
(www.quest.arc.nasa.gov) The Quest project is a service of the Education Program of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). Students can take virtual NASA tours with experts and participate in online projects with NASA scientists. The site also provides tips for educators about using the Internet in the classroom, as well as information about grant and funding opportunities. Other NASA sites include photographs from the Hubble Space Telescope and other space activities, including shuttle missions.

National Geographic Online
(www.nationalgeographic.com) The site contains feature articles from *National Geographic* magazine, as well as educational features for adults and children. A special section, National Geographic CHILDREN, provides educational games, interesting stories, and a pen pal network. The Geography Education page offers ideas for educators, as well as networking opportunities and resources.

National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST) *(www.wellesley.edu/WCW/CRW/SAC/niost.html)* The Institute's mission is to improve school-age childcare programs nationally through collaborations with communities, individuals, and organizations, and to increase public awareness of the importance of children's out-of-school time. It concentrates on research, education and training, consultation, and program development. The National Institute on Out-of-School Time is located at the Center for Research On Women, Wellesley College, 106 Central Street, Wellesley, MA 02181; (781) 283–2547.

National Science Foundation *(www.nsf.gov)* Supplementing its primary mission supporting scientific research and education, NSF sponsors an annual Global Science and Technology Week in collaboration with various government agencies. It provides free educational materials and hands-on activities about science for elementary through junior high students, and it is adaptable for preschoolers and teenagers. Some centers may wish to join a local or regional partner in the NSTW Network. The online materials include an overview of NSF programs. NSF also manages the Bayer-NSF Award for Community Innovation, a competition in which teams of middle school-age youth (with adult coaches) apply science and technology to real-world problems (e.g., building safe play spaces, cleaning up pollution). While most teams are from schools, some are from community organizations. Information on how to participate is posted on the NSF Web site.

Neighborhood Networks
(www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org) The official Neighborhood Networks Web site offers a wealth of information about the initiative and centers' activities, including copies of newsletters, fact sheets, and other publications, and a searchable resource database organized by topic. Neighborhood Networks centers can use the contacts database to get contact information for other centers.

PBS Online *(www.pbs.org)* This is the home of comprehensive companion Web sites for more than 450 PBS television programs and specials, as well as original Web content and real-time learning adventures. Major programs have extensive supplemental materials, including audio and video files, on the Web site. PBS also covers a variety of subjects, ranging from news to history and the arts to science.

Science Junction *(www.ncsu.edu/sciencejunction)* This site contains information for teachers and students about a wide variety of science topics, with links to scientific journals, museums, and other resources. Its *Student Station* includes games and experiments to try at home and demonstrations and information on Internet-based science projects.

ThinkQuest *(www.thinkquest.org)* ThinkQuest and ThinkQuest Junior are international Web design contests open to Neighborhood Networks centers. Youth (ages 12–19) and children (grades 4–6) team with adult coaches to develop educational Web sites on topics of their choosing. These sites then are hosted on the "library" section of the ThinkQuest site and can be used for center program activities.

U.S. Department of Education Publications and Products *(www.ed.gov) ((800) USA-LEARN)* The Education Department's Web site provides access to education policies, statistics, resource directories, and catalogues, as well as newsletters, journals, and a wealth of accessible publications for teachers, parents, and older students. Many of these can be downloaded directly from the site or ordered for little or no cost; some are published in Spanish as well as English. Materials include tip sheets and project ideas originally designed for K–12 school activities, which can be used in Neighborhood Networks centers. The department publishes the *Helping Your Child* series (learn to read, learn math, do homework, etc.) and *Summer Home Learning Recipes*. Publications related to preparing for and funding college include *Think College? Me? Now?* and the *Student Guide to Financial Aid*. Neighborhood Networks centers

may also make good use of *The Parents' Guide to the Internet* as a reference or for parent information programs.

Federally funded regional technical assistance centers support school districts and teachers in various ways, from meeting the needs of bilingual, high-poverty, migrant, and at-risk youth to integrating technology into education programs. These centers conduct research, provide training, support school reform efforts, and disseminate information on a variety of educational issues. While they work primarily with schools, Neighborhood Networks centers may find the regional centers a useful source of materials and, perhaps, staff consultation. The Comprehensive Regional Assistance Centers may have useful resources on such issues as assessment and working with special student populations. Contact information can be found on the national Web site: *www.ccnetwork.org/*. Similarly, the Regional Technology in Education Consortia may have resources on using technology for education of different age groups and related professional development opportunities. The consortia's national Web site contains links to the regional offices: *www.rtec.org*.

FREE (Federal Resources for Educational Excellence) *(www.ed.gov/free)* is a subsite that links to scores of educational information and activities at other federal agencies. Many, but not all, use computers and the Web. Information links are organized by major topic (e.g., art, social studies, educational technology) and then by agency. A search engine is also available. This gateway can lead to project ideas, resources, and research information for youth of all ages. The links include virtual tours to the National Parks and the National Gallery of Art, cool stuff at the FBI, a project on making money at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, and others. There is access to many collections of art, music, and historical documents. Older youth may find this a useful research route. For younger children, staff may need to help find age-appropriate pages and adapt some activities.

Well Connected Educator *(www.gsh.org/wce)*
This is a Global Schoolhouse project site for
information and discussion about educational
technology. It includes a variety of articles and
forums of interest to community-based as well
as K–12 teachers, including links to project and
resource Web sites.

Yahooligans! *(www.yahooligans.com)*
Yahooligans! is the children's version of the
Yahoo! search site. It is designed to make Web
searching easier for children, and helps them
find sites appropriate for their use. Search topics
include: Around the World (countries, food,
holidays); Computers & Games (games, Web,
screen savers); Arts & Entertainment (TV,
movies, jokes, music); School Bell (social
studies, homework, math); Science & Oddities
(space, animals, dinosaurs); Sports &
Recreation (football, hobbies, wrestling); and
The Scoop (newspapers, weather, events). The
Web site also includes a dictionary,
encyclopedia, and online games.

Yucky *(www.yuckykids.discovery.com)* Yucky
describes its focus as science entertainment. It
provides information and activities for children
ages 6–15 about the natural world, with special
focus on worms, bugs, and the human body (one
section is called "Gross/Cool Body"). It also
includes a Web page with games and a question
and answer session called "Ask Wendell."

Neighborhood Networks Information

For more information about Neighborhood Networks, visit the Neighborhood Networks Web site at *www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org,* or contact the Neighborhood Networks information center toll-free at (888) 312–2743, or TTY at (800) 483–2209. The Web site contains valuable information for centers including:

HUD NN Coordinators
Neighborhood Networks Coordinators listing.

Center Database
Information about operational centers and those in planning. Neighborhood Networks Centers across the U.S. listed geographically by state.

Property Database
Information about Neighborhood Networks Properties listed geographically by state.

Resources Database
Information about funding, technical assistance, publications, and Web site resources.

News Database
Articles, press releases, success stories, and grand openings relevant to Neighborhood Networks.

List of Conferences
Training Calendar of Conferences and Training Events.

List of Resident Associations
Listing of Neighborhood Networks Properties with active Resident Associations.

Neighborhood Networks Consortia
List of Neighborhood Networks Consortia

Senior Properties
Listing of Senior Properties with Operational Neighborhood Networks Centers.

Online Networking
Talk with Neighborhood Networks staff and stakeholders via Online Networking.

- **Fact sheets.** Fact sheets are one-page summaries of various topics relevant to the operations of Neighborhood Network centers. Fact sheets that are currently available include an overview of the initiative, telehealth programs, health information, health partnerships, childcare, transportation, seniors, and community improvements at Neighborhood Network centers.

- *News Brief.* (current and past issues): A quarterly newsletter that highlights national achievements for a wide audience including partners and the public.

- *NNewsline.* (current and past issues): A quarterly newsletter that highlights topics of interest to Neighborhood Networks centers and coordinators.